

Bridging South Dakota

Strategic Plan

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# Introduction

Bridging South Dakota is a collaboration of organizations coming together to end domestic and sexual violence against individuals with disabilities or who are D/deaf. We work to improve the capacity of professionals, both disability agencies and non-disability related agencies, to provide safe, accessible, comprehensive, and trauma informed services to individuals with disabilities or who are D/deaf who have been subjected to sexual assault.

Bridging South Dakota is comprised of three organizations – Communication Service for the Deaf (CSD), South Dakota Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities (Coalition) and South Dakota Network Against Family Violence and Sexual Assault (The Network). We, as partners, share a concern for victims of sexual and domestic violence, as well as a concern for individuals of all ages with disabilities or are D/deaf[[1]](#footnote-1) who historically have been underserved by providers of victim’s services. We further share an acknowledgement that services and advocacy groups for individuals with disabilities and individuals who are D/deaf and hard of hearing can be much more effective in identifying and responding to incidents of victimization experienced by the people they serve. As a result we came together to respond to the OVW FY 2013 Education, Training and Enhanced Services to End Violence Against and Abuse of Women with Disabilities grant opportunity, and in September 2013, the Network was awarded funding for Bridging South Dakota.

This project consists of two phases: the planning and development phase and the implementation phase. Planning and development is comprised of four components: creation of a collaboration charter; development of a plan to conduct a needs assessment, completion of and a report on the needs assessment findings; and the completion of a strategic plan. The strategic plan will be the guide for the second phase of the project, implementation, and it is the focus of the report.

## Overview of the Planning and Development Phase

During the development of the collaboration charter the cornerstone for a collaborative relationship was put into place. Collaborative partners worked together to create a foundation illustrating our shared commitment, framework, and direction for the project. It defines our vision, mission, values, and the terms we use. It identifies the partnering agencies and describes each partner’s commitment and contributions to the project. It outlines the manner by which the team members will communicate, make decisions and manage conflict. It also describes how we will work to maintain confidentiality and mandatory reporting. The process of developing the collaboration charter solidified our partnership into “Bridging South Dakota”. The collaboration charter was approved by the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) in October 2014.

Bridging South Dakota project partners then began working to develop a plan to conduct a needs assessment. The Needs Assessment Plan outlined how Bridging South Dakota would gather information about our combined strengths and challenges in ensuring a safe, accessible and welcoming environment for sexual assault survivors who are D/deaf or have disabilities. The components of the plan described participant recruitment strategies, incentives, methodology, participant consent, confidentiality, safety, access, recruitment training, and the project work plan, including a variety of tools developed to use during the needs assessment activities. Focus group questions, interview questions, and survey questions were designed to elicit specific information from each audience. The needs assessment plan was approved by OVW in March 2015.

The needs assessment was conducted between March 2015 and June 2015. Bridging South Dakota then compiled the data obtained into the Needs Assessment Report. The report summarized our key findings and the implications. The report was approved by OVW October 2015. Based on the Needs Assessment findings, Bridging South Dakota developed this strategic plan. The information collected through the needs assessment is the plan which works to fulfill our mission by increasing the capacity of our statewide organizations through technical assistance, training and curricula. The strategic plan has been formed to address identified gaps and strengths in our current systems. The strategic plan will continue to be a guiding force of the changes that need to take place in order to provide knowledgeable, culturally sensitive and effective services throughout the state through the implementation phase of the project.

# Partner Agency Descriptions



The **South Dakota Network Against Family Violence and Sexual Assault** was established in 1991. The Network is a non-profit agency comprised of caring people dealing with the concerns of domestic violence and sexual assault victims. The member programs employ and support individuals of all racial, social, religious and economic groups, ages, and lifestyles. Rural, urban and tribal areas are proudly represented. The Network believes that the abuse of power in society fosters domestic violence, rape, gender inequality, racism, and poverty by perpetuating conditions in which certain groups benefit from the domination of others. The Network membership believes that domestic violence results from the use of force or threat to achieve and maintain control over others in intimate relationships. The Network opposes the use of violence as a means of control over others and supports equality in relationships. All programs and services are rooted firmly in the belief that people victimized by crime have the right to assume power over their own lives by making informed choices regarding their empowerment journey. The Network is dedicated to the empowerment of those victimized by domestic or sexual violence. Networking with other entities in our community creates avenues to impact long-term systemic and social change. The Network provides ongoing training, technical assistance, funding, system change work, and consultation to its member organizations.



The **South Dakota Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities (the Coalition)**, incorporated in 1990, is a statewide, cross-disability membership organization whose members include consumer, provider and advocacy organizations and individual members with and without disabilities. The Coalition advocates for public policy that ensures the self-determination, independence, empowerment, integration and inclusion of people with disabilities of all ages in South Dakota.

The Coalition believes in full inclusion of all people in all aspects of society, and believes that everyone should have the freedom of choice to pursue their own quality of life.

The Coalition has an extensive history of advocacy and training, and it has an extensive history of collaborative efforts across a variety of constituencies to promote social change at the local, state and national levels, which supports the full inclusion of people with disabilities of all ages.

The Coalition provides resources and advocacy for all individuals to exercise their rights and freedoms.

* We support the idea that people with greater needs should receive greater support, and people with greater gifts are called to share those gifts with others.
* We support the idea that people should be as active and independent members of society as they choose to be.
* We promote self-responsibility, self-determination, and freedom of choice.
* We want to expand our network of partners to provide opportunities for their involvement.
* We promote unity by serving as a single point of contact for all disability groups.

**Communication Service for the Deaf (CSD)** opened its doors in 1975 with a mission to both advocate for and create access to essential programs and services that make the world more equal for deaf and hard of hearing individuals. CSD began its journey as a small, but passionate grassroots movement in South Dakota and we have evolved in the decades since into an international organization that has positively affected millions of lives. For nearly forty years, CSD has worked to challenge convention by championing innovation, which has transformed the communications experience for deaf and hearing people. CSD is proud of our heritage, our talented and dedicated global workforce, and our persevering, unwavering devotion to our community.

We provide a variety of services such as:

* Interpreting
* Relay Services
* Contact Centers
* Human Services
  + Advocacy
  + Peer Support
  + Community Integration Training
  + Technical Assistance
  + Communication Assistance
  + Deaf Awareness training
  + Information and Referral
  + Adult Basic Education
  + Domestic Violence (DV and SA)
  + Equipment Distribution Program (EDP)
  + Deaf Health
  + Consultations

# Mission and Vision Statements

## Mission Statement

Bridging South Dakota seeks to improve services for victims and survivors with disabilities or who are D/deaf by cultivating the capacity of our statewide organizations to provide trauma-informed, safe and accessible interventions through technical assistance, training, and curricula.

## **Vision Statement**

We envision that survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking, who have disabilities or who are D/deaf, will receive knowledgeable, culturally sensitive and effective services from providers and advocates throughout the state of South Dakota.

# Needs Assessment Goals

Bridging South Dakota’s goal was focused on reviewing the internal capacity of our three organizations and our respective staff’s ability to provide technical assistance to our consumers and members surrounding the issue of sexual assault experienced by individuals with disabilities and D/deaf individuals. As part of this process, Bridging South Dakota conducted a statewide needs assessment.

**The goals of the needs assessment were to:**

1. Identify existing or needed **policies and procedures** of the Network, the Coalition, and CSD related to victim/survivors of sexual assault who have disabilities or who are D/deaf.
2. Identify the strengths and gaps in the provision of **technical assistance and training** for service providers throughout South Dakota related to victim/survivors of sexual assault who have disabilities or who are D/deaf.
3. Evaluate the current connections between the project partners, barriers to working together; and **opportunities to sustain, expand, and enhance** those relationships in order to provide technical assistance that facilitates accessible and effective services to victim/survivors of sexual assault who have disabilities or who are D/deaf.
4. Evaluate staff **knowledge about sexual assault, safety and accessibility** in order to build our capacity to provide technical assistance to programs who serve victim/survivors of sexual assault who have disabilities or are D/deaf.
5. Identify **best practices in the delivery of services** to victim/survivors of sexual assault who have disabilities or who are D/deaf.

# Needs Assessment Methodology & Summary

Bridging South Dakota used interviews and focus groups to gather information from The Network, Coalition, CSD, sexual assault crisis centers, mental health organizations, disability specific groups, and community support providers, as well as D/deaf consumers, individuals with disabilities and survivors of sexual assault.

The collaboration sought to complete its needs assessment in a manner that would include these various aspects of the state’s geography and respective populations – seeking to reflect our state’s racial, ethnic, cultural and economic diversity. The needs assessment was designed to connect with a variety of agencies across the state to gain a deeper understanding of the gaps across disciplines and throughout South Dakota. The needs assessment was the first step to understanding the opportunities and gaps in our organizations in order to create systemic change.

The needs assessment was conducted between March and June of 2015. Bridging South Dakota primarily used focus groups for gathering qualitative information. The bulk of interviews that took place were with leadership positions. The majority of the 20 focus groups and 12 interviews were conducted in April and May. One interview was rescheduled and conducted in early June. Our collaboration had hoped to conduct a cross disability focus group, but we were unable to bring together the group within the timeframe of the needs assessment. Two online surveys were conducted with the Board of Directors of The Network and the Coalition. CSD’s South Dakota Advisory group was not fully formed by the time the needs assessment was being conducted, therefore no survey was conducted. A total of 35 engagements occurred through the focus groups, interviews and surveys during the needs assessment reaching a total of 147 individuals.

The individuals and agencies we met with showed a great deal of compassion for the work they do and for the individuals with whom they work. They are resilient and creative when addressing the daily concerns they face. Findings of the needs assessment focused on the gaps that are present in an attempt to illustrate the need to make improvement. We will be able to do this through the strengths that are already in place, including recognizing the need to make improvements.

# Key Findings

**Key Finding #1 – Internal capacity building is needed for staff within the collaborative partners in order to provide better technical assistance throughout the state of South Dakota.**

In order to permeate knowledge throughout the state, staff of three collaborative partner agencies need to have a strong foundation of knowledge at the intersection of sexual assault, D/deaf culture and disability. Training is needed for staff to increase their expertise and to be aware of best practices for serving these individuals in order to provide appropriate technical assistance and guidance.

Although, each collaborative partner agency is extremely knowledgeable in their field of expertise there is an overall lack of policies and procedures to guide technical assistance especially at the intersection of sexual assault, D/deaf culture and disability. Collaborative partner agencies recognized there are no policies or procedures specifically focused on sexual assault in the workplace at any of the partner agencies. Most partners had policies in place supporting the response to domestic violence in the workplace and anti-sexual harassment policies. There is little guidance or written procedure on the response to staff or consumers experiencing sexual assault.

There is a need to create and improve policies and procedures on providing technical assistance, accommodating individuals auxiliary aids and service requests during meetings and trainings, and appropriate response to sexual assault victim/survivors both as direct and non-direct service providers.

**Key Finding #2** **- There are opportunities for the collaboration to continue to pool resources and knowledge to provide comprehensive technical assistance to agencies serving D/deaf survivors and survivors with disabilities.**

Each collaborative partner provides some training throughout the state on a variety of topics upon invitation from membership agencies and other interested parties. Technical assistance is provided by The Network and the Coalition by email, telephone, or in person on a nearly daily basis to individuals and membership agencies. CSD provides training on topics including sensitivity training and how to have a deaf friendly environment.

In other projects of the collaborative partners, a model of cross expertise has proven effective and may be viable to be replicated at the intersection of disabilities and sexual assault. By further partnering with collaboration agencies, Bridging South Dakota can encourage systems to be more inclusive and responsive to diverse groups by modeling partnership.

Through the growth of the collaboration, Bridging South Dakota, we have begun to familiarize ourselves with technology that assists in long distance communication that can cater to a variety of learning styles or accommodation/communication needs. By sharing this information and building on systems in use, we hope to reach individuals and agencies that might be otherwise missed during statewide trainings.

There is opportunity between partners to build on systems already in place to encourage training opportunities despite distance and time restraints. Bridging South Dakota hopes to better reach agencies in rural areas and agencies with limited staff availability utilizing such technology to keep one another engaged over long distances between face-to-face/ in person meetings.

There is a need to develop best practices for agencies to become accessible. Technical assistance tools will be developed to support agencies in their process of providing auxiliary aids and services. This includes where to find appropriate auxiliary aids and services within their communities, what are necessary auxiliary aids and services to have in place prior to offering services, and troubleshooting challenges for particular agencies. The collaboration will look into technology that can be installed in shelters that could support video technology for staff to join distance trainings, but also a videophone to support meetings between clients and staff with the assistance of a video interpreter, as well as allowing clients to make calls through the video relay service. Additional funding through local grant programs will be sought to support this endeavor.

**Key Findings #3 – There is an overall lack of expertise and knowledge throughout the state of South Dakota at the intersection of sexual assault, disability and D/deaf issues.**

There was great variance of expertise throughout staff and agencies across the state. Some individuals had personal or past work experience specific to the intersection. Others had no experience working with either sexual assault or individuals with disabilities or D/deaf individuals. Most participants recognized that there was still room to learn in order to provide better services.

Typically, there has been little to no formal training at the intersection of disabilities and sexual assault. The agencies we heard from indicated they do receive training on the intersection specifically as it relates to mandatory reporting training requirements and responsibilities. This training is geared towards mandatory reporting requirements surrounding issues of abuse, neglect and exploitation. It does not appear that training has been focused on using a trauma informed approach.

In order to better serve our membership agencies and consumers, there is a need to build the capacity of Bridging South Dakota by enhancing internal policies, procedures and knowledge. This will better qualify us to create trainings, resources, and other materials to support the state in becoming safe and accessible for individuals with disabilities and D/deaf individuals

**Key Finding #4 - There is limited cross delivery of services at the intersection of sexual assault crisis centers, disability and Deaf agencies, as agencies tend to work autonomously.**

Most agencies contacted through the needs assessment had limited knowledge across the fields of sexual assault crisis centers, disability and Deaf agencies. All agencies welcomed cross training opportunities and wanted to reach out to their counterparts in their community. Individuals with disabilities, survivors of sexual assault and D/deaf individuals are not consistently made aware of the services that may be available to them due to their service provider’s lack of shared knowledge at the intersection.

During the focus groups with Deaf consumers, individuals with disabilities and sexual assault survivors, it became apparent that there was little cross awareness between agencies. Survivors shared that they struggled to find support on their own, and even the therapists they were seeing weren’t readily aware of the support groups available in their area.Individuals with disabilities struggled to come up with an example when they were referred to an outside agency. Deaf consumers often advocated for their needs to be met at hearing agencies. If there is out of date information or if service providers do not know there are services that exist, individuals with disabilities, D/deaf individuals and survivors will struggle to find the services they desperately need.

Once services were started, there was also an expectation from individuals with disabilities for their service provider to be aware of the local resources in order to meet all of their individual needs.

When we spoke with agencies, most recalled working with an agency at the intersection at some point, but there was not regular contact to accurately reflect the services that could be offered. This resulted in limited understanding of the capabilities each agency has or the contribution they may be able to provide to any given situation.

Disability agencies indicated they were aware that many of the individuals they work with had experienced sexual assault at some point in their lives. The various groups felt that anywhere from 25 – 80% of the individuals they work with had a history of sexual assault. However, very few had made referrals for services or counseling with sexual assault crisis centers. Most likely, some of this discrepancy is based on the timing of the sexual assault. Disability agencies would refer individuals to counseling for support, but this led to questions about how to assist when counseling is refused.

**Key Finding #5** - **Service providers are not consistently aware of the best practices to ensure safe, welcoming and accommodating environments to sexual assault survivors who are D/deaf or have disabilities.**

It appears that service providers are not consistently meeting the needs of individuals with disabilities or D/deaf individuals when it comes to sexual assault, safety and accessibility. Staff at disability agencies and sexual assault crisis centers recognize there is a need to improve services by learning about resources and how to effectively provide services. Individuals with disabilities and D/deaf individuals often seek services after having already experienced trauma. The trauma could be (and often is) past abuse. It can be ongoing trauma from bullying, name-calling, verbal abuse and exclusion from peers and family or from accessing services. This initial trauma is experienced over and over, even daily, and is then coupled with the additional trauma of sexual assault. As agencies hope to better serve sexual assault survivors, who are D/deaf or have disabilities, they will need to view their services through a trauma informed lens.

We heard repeatedly from individuals with disabilities and D/deaf consumers how multiple agencies failed to meet their accommodation needs. Agencies that were given as examples included hospitals and doctor’s offices, schools, Social Security offices and Vocational Rehabilitation Services. Even though the agencies referred to in the focus groups are outside of the collaboration partners and their membership, these stories are excellent examples to improve how future services are provided.

D/deaf consumers talked about multiple issues with hospitals and doctor’s appointments, and how their communication needs were not met.Based on these experiences, individuals seeking services come to expect similar treatment from sexual assault and disability service providers. They may not reach out for help assuming that their needs won’t be met. Sexual assault crisis centers need to find ways to show their focus on safety and accessibility for individuals with disabilities and D/deaf individuals in the aftermath of sexual assault, just as disability service providers need to develop ways that create environments that encourage the disclosures of sexual assault where they feel safe doing so.

Many sexual assault crisis centers have not looked at physical accessibility on an ongoing basis. Some programs are based out of old buildings and were “grandfathered in” to fall under ADA requirements. Others have added on to existing structures, so some parts of the building or grounds are more physically accessible than others. Community support providers indicated they had work to do to increase physical accessibility as well. Bridging South Dakota could assist disability and sexual assault crisis centers to review physical accessibility and barrier removal, although funding to make needed changes would need to be addressed outside of this project.

While it is true that many parts of South Dakota still need to address physical accessibility and barrier removal; we found there is a need to address the lack of program/service accessibility and effective communication across the state. We found this acutely apparent when meeting with D/deaf consumers. There is a need to educate service providers how to be more accessible and to help empower individuals to advocate for themselves in order to receive accessible services.

CSD, as a direct service provider, already provides education to consumers on strengthening their self-advocacy skills. There could be opportunities to build this practice into sexual assault programs. Two of the three collaborative partners do not provide direct services and have a primary focus to address statewide matters by providing technical assistance to their membership. Through the focus groups with sexual assault survivors, individuals with disabilities, and D/deaf consumers, Bridging South Dakota recognized the need to have these groups provide a continued voice to the project. This will bring in an additional layer of accountability to ensure that changes are made to improve services.

Education is needed around the topic of disability etiquette, ADA requirements, and trauma informed care for both disability and sexual assault service providers. Accessibility and safety site reviews at membership agencies could assist in gaining access for individuals with disabilities and ensuring safe environments are present at any point of entry to services. Bridging South Dakota will explore how to form work groups with sexual assault survivors, individuals with disabilities and D/deaf consumers in order to strengthen the services provided throughout the state of South Dakota using best practices. Agencies and individuals across the state need to be informed of the services available for sexual assault, individuals with disabilities and D/deaf individuals. There are resources available in each arena, but seldom do the systems and resources cross disciplines to fully encompass the intersection.

# Foundation for Strategic Plan

The time remaining in the current funding period is limited and we recognize that there will be a need to request a no-cost extension in order to complete the short term goals. Bridging South Dakota is anticipating submitting a no-cost extension, in order to extend the grant period to March 31, 2017. If the no-cost extension is denied, the initiatives will continue through the current grant period with adjustments being made to the timelines as needed.

Bridging South Dakota participated in a two-day Strategic Planning retreat with technical assistance from Vera staff in November 2015. In addition to one technical assistance provider from Vera the participants consisted of: The Network’s Executive Director, intern, Disability Project Coordinator; The Coalition’s Executive Director, Program Specialist; and CSD’s South Dakota State Programs Director. CSD’s Director of Program Operations joined via an online program from out of state as time allowed.

As facilitated by Vera, the team utilized the key findings and recommendations from the Needs Assessment report to identify four primary goals and discussions surrounding long term initiatives to create a sustainable project.

* Build collaboration staff skills and capacity to provide technical assistance to members and other programs on sexual assault of people with disabilities and D/deaf individuals
* Increase member program capacity to respond to survivors with disabilities and D/deaf survivors
* Ensure safety and access at collaboration agencies, trainings and events
* Continue the commitment of Bridging South Dakota’s work

# Strategic Plan Work Structure

The Disability Project Coordinator will be responsible for coordinating initiatives and work groups. The Project Coordinator will communicate with Vera and OVW on the status of different activities and send in finished deliverables to OVW. Collaboration members will participate in groups specific to their areas of expertise and interest. Members will suggest key individuals within the partner agencies to participate in workgroups as needed and depending on their specific area of expertise. Membership agencies may be utilized to assist in completion of work or to assist in the forming of an Advisory group. The collaboration will continue to meet regularly to review the progress of the various workgroups and activities.

In order for change to be sustainable, it needs to become an essential part of each partner’s culture. We recognize that due to the structure of our collaboration being statewide and separated by distance we have additional hurdles, but maintain the ability to navigate around them. We anticipate that a linear timeline will not be conducive to completing the goals of the strategic plan. Some initiatives may interchange with one another as we work towards completing and submitting them to OVW for approval. Additionally, as many goals include the need for writing or recreating policies we realize that this work can extend the timeline due to the additional approval process of each agency’s respective board or leadership.

# Goals and Initiatives

## Goal 1: Build collaboration staff skills and capacity to provide technical assistance to members and other programs on sexual assault of people with disabilities and D/deaf individuals

### **Initiative 1.1:** Create an opportunity for staff to meet each other and learn about the work of the collaboration

Although the collaboration partners have had opportunities to learn about each agency and their work, there has been little opportunity for other staff to interact with and understand the work each agency does. Furthermore, there is room to expand knowledge surrounding what Bridging South Dakota has been working on and what we hope to continue to do. We will be developing an event to formally introduce staff outside of Bridging South Dakota to the collaboration. This is described as an introductory event to start off the project’s implementation. We will look at multiple opportunities in order to maximize the time spent with as many staff from each agency as needed. During this event, we expect that Bridging South Dakota will discuss the project and the core work that each agency does outside of the project.



**Expected Outcome:**

Bridging South Dakota’s presentation to agency staff will increase understanding of the project and each agency’s work. Staff outside of the collaboration will feel more comfortable reaching out for assistance from collaboration partners when providing technical assistance at the intersection of sexual assault, disabilities and D/deaf issues. This will expand the intersection of shared knowledge and deepen current relationships between The Network, The Coalition and CSD. Utilizing the relationships already built between collaboration members, Bridging South Dakota will create and foster further engagements across the organizations to facilitate change beyond the current grant funding.

### **Initiative 1.2:** Develop experiential training or activities for collaboration staff to experience/ share knowledge

The Needs Assessment report indicated that there is a need to develop internal capacity to expand the intersection of sexual assault, disability and D/deaf knowledge within the collaboration agencies. This will be done by conducting cross training and participating in on-going trainings on relevant issues of sexual assault, D/deaf culture and disability. In order to provide relevant technical assistance across the state, it is imperative that all staff seek and attend current and relative trainings addressing technical assistance, issues of sexual assault, D/deaf culture and disability, including best practices for services. As our agencies continue to expand the intersection of knowledge we will be able to come together to create and provide a wide range of expertise at the intersection throughout the state of South Dakota. In order to make changes to the existing culture of each agency, policy and procedures will be developed to ensure an ongoing focus is made at the intersection that will outlast the current grant period.



**Expected Outcome:**

The three collaborative agencies will be more integrated surrounding sexual assault, disabilities, and D/deaf concerns. A deeper understanding of each agency will exist beyond collaboration members and deepen existing relationships. There will be policy and procedure indicating an ongoing training plan for both new and existing staff in order to create long term systemic change.

### **Initiative 1.3:** Create a training for collaboration staff members which includes a focus on sexual assault survivors with disabilities and D/deaf survivors

During the focus groups conducted with collaboration agency staff, it was indicated that there was a need to train staff on sexual assault, specific to individuals with disabilities or D/deaf individuals. In order to provide quality training and technical assistance to improve services to individuals with disabilities and D/deaf individuals who have experienced sexual assault, further staff development is needed within The Network, the Coalition and CSD. Staff indicated their knowledge varied depending on past personal and work experiences. Specific training and education is needed to increase the knowledge and understanding of trauma-informed services. The collaboration will collect existing trainings from collaboration partners and review the information. Trainings will be developed to include a module on disabilities, D/deaf culture, and sexual assault dynamics. Current staff at each collaboration agency will be trained, in addition to each collaboration partner agency incorporating the curriculum into the orientation of new employees moving forward.



**Expected Outcome:**

By incorporating employee training into orientation on the intersection of sexual assault, disabilities and D/deaf issues, this training will allow for more awareness and a stronger framework to be developed as each agency provides technical assistance and training to membership agencies and individuals in the community. This training will provide identical information being taught at each collaboration agency and to new employees on an ongoing basis developing a strong baseline of knowledge at the intersection.

### **Initiative 1.4:** Create a resource/referral list for collaboration staff and program staff

In order to create a stronger network of resources across the state of South Dakota, there is a need to give tools to each agency staff specific to the intersection of sexual assault, disabilities and D/deaf concerns. It was apparent during the Needs Assessment that staff was not aware of available resources for individuals with disabilities, sexual assault survivors, or D/deaf individuals. We will develop an internal referral list for staff to begin to build knowledge of the resources that are available. This will not be an exhaustive list of each resource that is available, but a starting point to help direct calls that come in to any of the three partner agencies in order to help get the information needed. There will be a small guide of questions to ask the caller in order to assist them accessing the agency that will be able to help. This will be led by the Coalition as they have a similar document for disability focused agencies.



**Expected Outcome:**

This referral list will help familiarize each partner agency with the contacts of alternate collaborative agencies that can help assist with technical assistance calls as they arise. The list will provide language to be used to assist individuals and agencies reach the help they are asking for.

## **Goal 2:** Increase member program capacity to respond to survivors with disabilities and D/deaf survivors

### **Initiative 2.1:** Create Advisory Group

The Needs Assessment highlighted the importance of engaging survivors of sexual assault, individuals with disabilities, and D/deaf individuals. Although, two of the three collaborative partners do not provide direct services, we are all driven to create an environment where these voices are heard. Bridging South Dakota will create a group of key stakeholders to assist us in creating tools and best practices in the delivery of services at this intersection.

Since we are a statewide collaboration, there is still needed discussion on the logistics of such a group. Initially, we hope this group will assist the work being developed throughout the implementation phase of the project. In the long term, we hope to increase the role of the advisory group, in order to provide further sustainability and systemic change. The Coalition will be leading this initiative upon development as they have a greater knowledge of groups working with individuals with disabilities and the Coalition’s board is comprised of individuals with disabilities. The Disability Project Coordinator will have a large role in coordinating the meetings of the advisory group once roles and logistics are explored.



**Expected Outcome:**

The advisory group will add much needed perspective to the work of Bridging South Dakota. This group will provide a broader understanding of the issues that are experienced statewide for individuals with disabilities, D/deaf individuals, and sexual assault survivors on a personal and professional level. In the long-term, we hope to see this group create systemic change throughout the state of South Dakota.

### **Initiative 2.2:** Safety planning for individuals with disabilities and D/deaf individuals

Bridging South Dakota will review the safety plans that have been approved by OVW through other similar projects. We will adapt the safety plans to be used in South Dakota, as needed. This will generate a greater understanding of the nuances that arise in the lives of individuals with disabilities and D/deaf individuals surrounding their safety needs following a sexual assault or domestic violence incident. Many shelters and crisis agencies utilize safety plans in their daily work, but very few utilize versions that discuss safety needs specific to individuals with disabilities or D/deaf individuals. Additionally, few disability service providers utilize safety plans to assist the individuals they are working with following a violent incident.



**Expected Outcome:**

This tool will raise the awareness of agencies to the specific needs individuals with disabilities and D/deaf individuals may have during safety planning. It will foster an environment to allow individuals with disabilities and D/deaf individuals to take active roles in their safety. We anticipate that this tool will be utilized in agencies outside of shelters and crisis agencies to broaden the intersection of support for individuals with disabilities and D/deaf individuals following sexual assault or domestic violence.

### **Initiative 2.3:** Increase accessibility for D/deaf individuals in shelters and sexual assault crisis programs

Limited access for effective communication for D/deaf individuals was a recurring theme throughout the Needs Assessment process. Shelters and sexual assault crisis programs recognized there is room for improvement of communication. There is an overall lack of awareness on how to communicate with a D/deaf individual or how to access interpreters in a crisis situation, especially outside of regular business hours. Some agencies cited utilizing writing until an interpreter can be reached because they were not aware of other options, such as video remote interpreting.

CSD will take the lead on this initiative as they are more aware and understanding of the needs of D/deaf individuals. They are involved in other state projects through their nationwide organization. CSD will partner with The Network in engaging the shelters and other system advocates on their needs to access videophones and other technology. Training will then be developed to encourage sustainable use of the equipment and along with CSD’s ongoing support.

**Expected Outcome:**

Agencies and system advocates will have the knowledge and technology in place to assist with D/deaf survivors’ communication prior to a crisis situation. This familiarity will come through as trauma informed care and an increase in the number of D/deaf individuals seeking help following sexual assault or domestic violence. CSD will provide ongoing support so that agencies and system advocates will have direct support for issues that arise.

### **Initiative 2.4:** Explore distance technical assistance options and develop guidelines to support this practice

Bridging South Dakota has utilized internet based programs to meet in order to counterbalance the cost and time of traveling to meet in person. We want to expand this technology to be used to reach individuals and agencies that may not be available to participate with in-person statewide trainings. We will need to develop guidelines to assist supporting these technology practices, including accessibility. The guidelines will be used for the trainings or webinars for the products explained within this strategic plan.

The three collaborative partners need to develop a clear process of how information at the intersection of disability, D/deaf culture and sexual assault can be connected with member agencies and other constituents, and how these modes of communication would be best utilized to share that information with members and those served. Procedures will be developed to support staff at all levels to utilize guidelines and create an inclusive environment. The Coalition will begin this initiative as they have a greater expertise seeking accessible options. The Project Coordinator and the Coalition will work together to develop guidelines and tip sheets.



**Expected Outcome:**

We anticipate that we will have a greater reach to rural agencies and other agencies or individuals who are not able to travel or attend in person trainings by providing long distance technical assistance. The guidelines developed will further assist other trainings each collaborative agency conducts to be more inclusive and to have a broader reach. Procedures and policies will be developed to assist in the best practices creating long term systemic change.

### **Initiative 2.5:** Create series of tip sheets on acquiring accommodations, hiring interpreters, and securing funding to support auxiliary aids and services

A series of tip sheets will be developed to increase member program capacity to respond to survivors with disabilities and D/deaf survivors. These will include a variety of topics that were asked to be developed to assist in building this capacity. A few topics included: how to acquire accommodations and auxiliary aids and services, how to hire interpreters and how to secure funding to support the cost of auxiliary aids and services. Bridging South Dakota will prioritize the tip sheet series and topics, including determining how to disseminate the tip sheets as they are developed.



**Expected Outcome:**

The tip sheets will allow individuals and agencies to have additional resources available in order to better serve the individuals with whom they work. The trainings held in conjunction with the tip sheets will provide a stronger baseline of knowledge and increase the overall understanding of issues that arise at the intersection of sexual assault, disability and D/deaf.

## **Goal 3:** Ensure safety and access at collaboration agencies, trainings and events

### **Initiative 3.1:** Create workplace violence, sexual assault and accessibility policies for collaboration agencies

Our Needs Assessment report indicated that there were gaps in policies or a complete lack of policies of each partner when it came to workplace violence, sexual assault, and accessibility policies. We need to do a comprehensive review of existing polices and update or write policies to fill these gaps. Each agency has a different protocol of updating and writing policies, with two agencies requiring their Board of Directors to approve the policies. CSD is a national agency and has its own procedure for creating and approving policies. We expect that this will be challenging, but necessary to complete within the remaining time of the grant.



**Expected Outcome:**

By developing policies at each agency focused on workplace violence, sexual assault and accessibility, our organizations will be more integrated and will create a safer and more accessible environment for employees at the collaboration partner agencies. We will encourage membership agencies to develop similar policies and provide technical assistance as needed.

### **Initiative 3.2:** Ensure job descriptions and hiring process is inclusive

As with the policies surrounding safety and access, a lack of job descriptions and procedures to ensure an inclusive hiring process was apparent. The directors of the three partner agencies will assess the current job descriptions and address ways to be more inclusive. They will modify and create policies to support an inclusive hiring process moving forward. As policy changes will be required, there may be some delay as boards of directors will need to approve the policy changes.



**Expected Outcome:**

Ensuring an inclusive hiring process and job description will further expand the intersection and create long-term systemic change. These changes will also serve as a model for other agencies to adapt their hiring processes.

### **Initiative 3.3:** Address confidentiality concerns that may arise upon disclosures of sexual assault and/or disability

Through the course of the needs assessment, each agency realized there was a lack of policies or procedures. It was agreed that a policy was needed to guide response specific to confidentiality upon disclosures of sexual assault and/or a disability. The disclosure may look different depending on who discloses (i.e. client, membership agency, or staff) and confidentiality concerns could be different. The collaboration will discuss the best practices for a disclosure of sexual assault and/or disability and review the policies that will support best practices. The directors at each collaboration agency will then modify and/or create a model policy. Board approval may delay the process of adopting the policy. The model policy will be made available to membership agencies of The Network and The Coalition.



**Expected Outcome:**

Having a policy in place to support an appropriate response to a disclosure of sexual assault and/or disability will assist in providing a welcoming environment for such disclosures.

### **Initiative 3.4:** Create model policy with training for accessibility and safety during agency hosted events and trainings

Each collaborative partner provides trainings throughout the state. A policy needs to be developed to further support the need for accessibility and safety at each training and event. This will support long-term change and encourage more exchange between the three collaboration agencies.



**Expected Outcome:**

The collaboration agencies will commit to hosting accessible and safe project related activities, e.g. training, events. Long-term change will be created by having written policy. Membership agencies will be encouraged to adopt similar policies and technical assistance will be available as needed.

### **Initiative 3.5:** Develop disclosure policy for CSD, as a direct service provider

CSD works directly with individuals who may disclose sexual assault. In order to have a trauma focused response, guidelines and policies for responding to a disclosure will be developed. Additionally, the Deaf community is a small and tight knit group with overlapping roles and relationships; therefore confidentiality is a paramount concern to be addressed.

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**Expected Outcome:**

CSD staff will be better equipped to respond to the disclosure of a sexual assault and able to address needs and provide services while maintaining confidentiality.

### **Initiative 3.6:** Staff safety policy for CSD including in-office, home visits, and public events

During the Needs Assessment, CSD stood out as an agency that provides direct services for advocacy and support to D/deaf individuals. When discussing safety needs and policies, it was readily apparent that CSD staff could be put in dangerous situations in either home visits or in-office visits. By training staff in ways to stay safe in a variety of situations, we hope to prepare staff to minimize dangerous events from occurring. CSD will look into similar agencies that provide in-home services and develop policies to encompass the situations that may occur.



**Expected Outcome:**

CSD staff will develop policy and training to increase workplace safety habits for both in-office and services provided outside of the CSD facilities.

### **Initiative 3.7:** Safety and Access reviews for all agencies

In order to determine if our environments are safe, welcoming and accessible to persons with disabilities or individuals who are deaf and survivors of sexual assault, we need to utilize a tool that will assist us in evaluating the accessibility of each organization. We will review existing OVW-approved tools and modify appropriate tools as needed. Bridging South Dakota will utilize the tool to assess each collaborative agency. We also want to extend the safety and access review to membership agencies of The Network and The Coalition in order to remove potential barriers and create more inclusive services within the state of South Dakota. The Coalition has performed accessibility audits in the past and will be the lead on this activity to develop an appropriate tool for Bridging South Dakota. The collaboration will determine a timeline to conduct safety and accessibility audits at agencies outside of the collaboration. We expect to utilize the determined tool in an ongoing manner to ensure that changes are being made to create an inclusive environment. A plan will be developed to address any identified barriers and a follow up review will be scheduled.



**Expected Outcome:**

Bridging South Dakota collaborative partners will be more cognizant of what defines a safe and accessible environments. Membership agencies will be encouraged to utilize the tool to create more inclusive environments as individuals with disabilities and D/deaf individuals seek sexual assault services.

## **Goal 4:** Continue the commitment of Bridging South Dakota’s work

Our fourth goal has both short-term and long-term components. Some of the activities outlined earlier in this document will support the long-term activities Bridging South Dakota foresees conducting. The following initiatives will need a timeline to support the completion of the activities described.

### **Initiative 4.1:** Continue to build partnerships and relationships

Bridging South Dakota is committed to expanding our partnership and relationship in order to make widespread change. In order to have a greater reach, we recognize the importance of participating and promoting each other’s events and work. We will have ongoing discussions to identify additional partners and ways to strengthen existing relationships. Many agencies already recognized how important it was to reach out to their counterparts to build supportive relationships. By highlighting some of the partnerships already in place and expanding on their processes, Bridging South Dakota will be able to expand the cross delivery of services. Bridging South Dakota will look for opportunities at statewide trainings to develop networking opportunities while increasing shared knowledge at the intersection.

Bridging South Dakota will find opportunities to present and have dialogue on the continued progress of our collaboration and evaluate the outreach activities conducted in order to have concrete evidence of a greater intersection of sexual assault, D/deaf and disability. We will seek opportunities and funding to attend multidisciplinary conferences and trainings in order to build on and maintain our knowledge.

**Expected Outcome:**

These activities will expand the intersection of sexual assault, D/deaf and disability further throughout the state. This will allow for a better community response for all victims and foster a trauma informed support system.

### **Initiative 4.2:** Secure additional funding for Bridging South Dakota

Bridging South Dakota will continue to seek additional funding for the work of Bridging South Dakota. A process will be developed to identify funding sources, share details of requirements and timelines with the collaboration, and to have a plan for writing and filing grant applications. All collaborative members are committed to continuing the work. The Network will carry on as the lead agency for OVW grant requests. Other grant opportunities will determine who should be the submitting agency as appropriate.

### **Initiative 4.3:** Continue collaboration work to sustain the work of Bridging South Dakota beyond lifetime of grant

To secure our post-funding work a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) will be developed to assure that Bridging South Dakota collaborative partners continue our work. As we build additional capacity we believe that we will have a strong partnership beyond the lifetime of the grant. The MOU will be created with the assistance of leadership at each partner agency and will include a structure for continued work. It will be sent to OVW for approval and once approved will be signed and put in place. This MOU will be completed within six months of the approval of strategic plan.

# Summary

Bridging South Dakota has spent over two years on our planning and development phase, building relationships, identifying our agencies’ and statewide needs and is now moving to implement needed changes. We are committed and focused on creating the changes identified in our strategic planning report. This plan will create the systemic change needed to increase the capacity of our statewide organizations to provide trauma-informed, safe and accessible interventions through technical assistance, training and curricula in order to improve services for victims and survivors with disabilities or who are D/deaf in South Dakota. The strategic plan will guide us through the process of activities within the four initiatives.

Bridging South Dakota has identified goals to help create the systemic changes both internal to the collaboration and externally through membership. The initiatives will form the foundation for the future collaborative efforts and guide our sustained focus beyond the lifetime of the current funding period. All partner agencies are committed to making these changes and are motivated to begin the work in the implementation phase and beyond. We are confident that the changes identified in our strategic plan will create change within our organizations and the state as whole.

1. Bridging South Dakota recognizes that not everyone identifies as D/deaf and we strive to respect individual identification preferences. We understand that essentially“deaf” refers to individuals with hearing loss. The lowercase “d” reflects a physical or audiological perspective, or those who choose not to be defined by the uppercase “D”. While, Deaf refers to individuals who identify with and participate in the language, culture and community of Deaf people, based on sign language. The capital “D” reflects this socio-cultural point of view, which may or may not be accepted by all people with varying hearing status, e.g., hard of hearing individuals. For the purposes of this document, D/deaf will be used and is intended to encompass the full spectrum of hearing status, cultural backgrounds, and identities. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)